

ILLOCUTIONARY FORCE, SALIENCE  
AND ATTENTION MANAGEMENT  
—A SOCIAL COGNITIVE  
PRAGMATIC PERSPECTIVE\*

ÁGNES HÁMORI

Research Centre for Multilingualism  
Research Institute for Linguistics, Hungarian Academy of Sciences  
Benczúr u. 33.  
H-1068 Budapest  
Hungary  
agnes.hamori@freemail.hu

**Abstract:** The paper discusses the role of attention in speech acts from a social cognitive pragmatic perspective. Attention is fundamental in several aspects of language use and also plays a pivotal role in the processing of utterance functions (especially ‘illocutionary force’). Through construal operations, the illocutionary force of an utterance can be brought to the listener’s attention in various ways: it can be salient to varying degrees, clear or unclear, foregrounded or backgrounded, according to the speaker’s communicative and social aims. Attention management concerning illocutionary force may simultaneously affect several components of an utterance, yielding ‘attention alternatives’ in speech acts. The paper attempts to give an overview—based on the examples analysed here and on the relevant literature—of the most important dimensions along which these alternatives may vary. Finally, some examples from a political debate are presented to illustrate how attention management related to illocutionary force can serve the speaker’s social and interactional aims and become part of his global impression-making strategies.

**Keywords:** attention management, speech acts, salience, illocutionary force, social cognitive pragmatics

## 1. Introduction

The relationship between attention and speech acts is a broad issue; in the present paper, I only focus on a subset of relevant phenomena per-

\* I would like to thank the members of the Functional linguistics workshop of Loránd Eötvös University, Budapest, and the anonymous reviewers of this paper for their helpful comments and suggestions.

taining to attention differences in expressing illocutionary force. I begin by introducing the key concepts regarding attention and construal (section 2), then investigate their relationship with illocutionary force and the functioning of speech acts in general, and discuss the most important dimensions of variation (section 3). Finally, in section 4, some examples from a political debate are presented to illustrate how attention management in speech acts can serve the speaker's social and interactional aims in connection with his global impression-making strategy.

Functional cognitive linguistics puts a premium on studying language not only in its relation to cognition in general but also in its embeddedness in social interaction within a cultural context (Langacker 2001; Chafe 1994; Tomasello 1999). The relationship between language, the mind and social action is especially relevant for the study of speech acts, i.e., utterances used to perform actions (Austin 1962; Searle 1969; Marmaridou 2000), whose functioning can be best described in the matrix of social, cultural, and cognitive factors. Despite this fact, most of the research on the topic has been conducted in a philosophical or interactional/intercultural pragmatic framework, while cognitive approaches remain somewhat underrepresented (notable exceptions include Croft 1994 and Marmaridou 2000). The present paper discusses the important relationship between **speech acts, social interaction, construal** and **attention** from a social cognitive pragmatic perspective (Verschueren 1999; Marmaridou 2000; Croft 2009), with the aim of considering both the relevant cognitive and social aspects of speech act use, and opening the way for new insights and considerations while also drawing on existing ones.

## 2. Attention and its significance in language

Attention plays a ubiquitous, if often overlooked, role in language. Attention generally refers to selectivity of processing and/or focusing of consciousness and is fundamental in distinguishing between relevant and less relevant details, old and new information, in identifying discourse topics and in many other fields (cf. Chafe 1994; Talmy 2007; 2009). Here I will be concerned primarily with its functioning in the **construal** of utterances. From this perspective, attention is directly linked to conceptualisation, the notion of viewing arrangement and construal of conceptual

contents.<sup>1</sup> A central tenet of cognitive linguistics is the idea that a particular situation can be **viewed and construed** in alternative ways so that its components may take different places in processing and attention: some details may be in the foreground or focus of attention while others stay in the background; some may be active, others semi-active or inactive; they may be viewed from up close (in a higher resolution) or from a distance (in a lower resolution), etc. (cf. *activation*: Chafe 1994; Deane 1992; *focus* and *periphery*: Chafe 1994; Langacker 2008; *figure* and *ground*: Talmy 2000; *foreground* and *background*: Langacker 2008; also Verhagen 2007; Talmy 2007; 2009).

There are several dimensions along which construal and attention may vary. Langacker's (1987, 116–37) key notions are selection, perspective, and level of abstraction, while Talmy's (2000) criteria include configurational structure, perspective, distribution of attention, and force dynamics (cf. Croft–Cruse 2004; Talmy 2007; Verhagen 2007). Here my point of departure will be Langacker's framework (Langacker 2008), in which the dimensions of specificity, focusing, prominence, and perspective are distinguished. **Specificity** concerns the level of precision or detail at which a situation or entity is described. **Focusing** pertains to the degree of attention a particular foregrounded detail of a conceptual content receives in comparison to elements in the background. A closely related dimension is that of **prominence** or salience, which here concerns the focusing of attention in terms of profiling and trajector/landmark alignment. Finally, an important dimension is **perspective**, or viewing arrangement, the most obvious aspect of which is the vantage point assumed by the speaker (Langacker 2008, 84); closely related to vantage point is the aspect of **subjectivity** vs. **objectivity**.

Attention and construal are not exclusively matters of the speaker's cognitive processes. Rather, they function in an intersubjective way in collective meaning generation in discourse, with the interlocutors operating a joint attention frame (Tomasello 1999; Clark 1996; Verschueren 1999; Langacker 2001; 2008). This frame allows the speaker to adapt meaning construal to the attentive/cognitive processes attributed to the listener, and to shape or modify them in the service of her own goals. Hence, construal typically hinges on both the speaker's attention and her management of the listener's attentive processes.

<sup>1</sup> There are interesting correlations between the visual and the conceptual functioning of attention; hence, the visual metaphor may be useful for linguistic research as well, cf. Langacker (2001, 144; 2008, 60); Chafe (1994, 53).

### 3. Illocutionary force, attention management and speech acts

Although most studies investigate the role of attention and construal in the expression of propositional content, attention also plays an important part in the processing of **functions** and the interactional aspect of utterances; especially, what **action** the speaker performs by her use of language, what an utterance count as, i.e., what its ‘**illocutionary force**’ is (cf. Austin 1962; Searle 1975; Marmaridou 2000; Sadock 2004). The illocutionary force of a speech act appears not always uniformly in the interlocutors’ attention: it may be foregrounded or backgrounded, compared with the propositional content or other possible illocutionary forces; it may be schematic or specific to varying degrees; salient or non-salient (i.e., easy or more difficult to access), and associated with a higher or lower level of prominence.<sup>2</sup> Fore- or backgroundedness, salience, and degree of linguistic elaboration of illocutionary force depends on how much attention the speaker wishes to direct to it, and how salient and obvious she wants the illocutionary force to be, according to her aims and the socio-cultural context of the interaction. Illocutionary force and its construal for purposes of attention may have a global impact influencing the elaboration of other components of speech act meaning. This yields ‘attention alternatives’ in speech acts, to be employed by the speakers as they are adapting meaning construal to their own goals, the desired (‘perlocutionary’) effects, the socio-cultural context and the attentive processes attributed to the listener.

The attention alternatives of speech acts may vary along several dimensions, in specific ways, due to the central role of illocutionary force, the multifunctionality of speech acts (simultaneous occurrence of

<sup>2</sup> Foregroundedness, salience and prominence are closely related, but not fully identical. *Foregrounding* refers to the focusing of attention. The term *salience* may be applied to the foregroundedness of a phenomenon in attention (Talmy 2009, 2), but it can also refer to accessibility of a meaning or concept (ease of access, speed of activation or activated status, Chafe 1994, 53; Deane 1992, 34; Giora 2002), or may be used synonymously with *prominence*, i.e., the potential of an entity to attract attention; where a distinction can be made between ontological/intrinsic prominence (Schmid 2007, 120) and relative prominence (emerging from unexpectedness or the markedness of a linguistic choice). In the present paper, the salience of an illocutionary force will be interpreted primarily in terms of ease of access, which grants it a foregrounded status with respect to alternative illocutionary forces or meanings. However, mention will also be made of a speech act’s intrinsic and relative salience (‘prominence’).

transactional and interactional functions) and their embeddedness in social interaction and cultural conventions. In what follows, I give an overview of the most important dimensions with a focus on attention management concerning illocutionary force, discussing such factors as explicitness, schematicity, length, directness/indirectness, conventionality and perspective. Each of these will be shown to contribute to the way a speech act is being attended to and interpreted.

### 3.1. Explicitness and specificity

One of the most fundamental dimensions of attention differences in speech acts concerns the **explicitness** of illocutionary force. As the examples below suggest, the illocutionary force of an utterance may be expressed either implicitly or explicitly (cf. Austin 1962, 76).

- (1) (a) *This doesn't work like this.*<sup>3</sup>  
 (b) I warn you that this doesn't work like this.

In (1a), the illocutionary force (warning) is only implicit, while (1b) makes it explicit. Explicitness may have different sources, usually identified as illocutionary force indicating devices (IFID's), which include (i) metalinguistic comments (*I have a question*), (ii) the use of a performative verb (*I ask you to come here*), (iii) the use of a non-performative IFID verb or some other lexical element with a similar function (*Please come here*), (iv) morphosyntactic markers of sentence type or the mood of the verb (*Come here!*), and (v) pragmatic softeners and strengtheners (*Could you come here somehow?*) (Searle 1969, 62; Ervin-Tripp 1976; Szili 2002). Explicitness is a scalar dimension: at one end of the explicitness scale is the metareflective specification of the speech act being performed (*It's an order*); at the other end we find such aspects of a grammatical construction as the marking of sentence type by word order or intonation (Croft 1994; Imrényi 2008), which can be considered as tools of minimal explicitness (Searle 1969, 30). It should be noted, though, that not all speech acts can be made explicit by performative expressions (cf. compliments).

<sup>3</sup> Most examples are collected from everyday conversations, which is marked here by italicisation; some examples (e.g., (1b), (2b, c)) have been invented for illustrative purposes; they are not italicised. All non-English examples in this paper are in Hungarian.

Explicitness correlates strongly with levels of attention. Explicit illocutionary force is generally foregrounded and more prominent than its implicit counterpart. It also stands out more with respect to the propositional content, whereas implicit illocutionary force tends to remain in the background. Furthermore, higher levels of explicitness translate into higher degrees of salience: an illocutionary force that is made more explicit is typically more salient, i.e., easier to access than an implicit one (cf. Langacker 2008, 66) (although this is greatly influenced by contextual support and the degree of conventionality associated with the construction in question). In addition, increased explicitness may indicate a higher level in the speaker's metapragmatic awareness of illocutionary force, as suggested by the fact that making the latter explicit often involves the use of metalinguistic comments. Finally, explicitness also defines and fixes illocutionary force, while implicitness may render it rather blurred and more negotiable.

Explicitness has a direct bearing on the dimension of **schematicity/specificity**. Speech acts may show varying degrees of specificity, depending on the type of their illocutionary force and the level at which it is elaborated. In an implicit speech act, illocutionary force is usually schematic and stays in the background, taking the form of an 'illocutionary potential' (Alston 1994). Explicitness, by contrast, entails that the utterance's illocutionary force becomes more specific, with one of its semantic components being profiled (Langacker 2008, 66). Hence, for example, a schematic 'statement' may be further specified as an act of providing information, declaring a fact, expressing an opinion, issuing a warning, or even as passing judgment or making a complaint. These options put different meaning components in profile such as objectivity (in acts of providing information), speaker commitment (in declarations), or the speaker's emotional involvement (in complaints), which also vary in terms of intended (perlocutionary) effect and expected response, cf. Croft (1994).

In the examples below, the neutral domain of 'directives' will be our point of departure into more specific (elaborate) illocutionary forces: a request in (2), a command in (3) and a suggestion in (4).

- |     |     |   |                     |
|-----|-----|---|---------------------|
| (2) | (a) | <i>Give me that chocolate!</i>            | schematic directive |
|     | (b) | Please give me that chocolate!            | ↓                   |
|     | (c) | Let me ask you to give me that chocolate. | request             |

- |     |     |  |                     |
|-----|-----|--|---------------------|
| (3) | (a) | <i>Give me that chocolate!</i>           | schematic directive |
|     | (b) | Give it to me at once!                   | ↓                   |
|     | (c) | This is an order, give it to me!         | command             |
| (4) | (a) | <i>Give me that chocolate!</i>           | schematic directive |
|     | (b) | You should give that chocolate to me.    | ↓                   |
|     | (c) | I suggest you give that chocolate to me. | suggestion          |

All these examples are directive; however, they highlight or profile (Langacker 1987, 183) different aspects or semantic components of the speech act being performed: politeness (in requests), strong speaker expectations for the listener to comply and disparity in the social status of the interlocutors (in commands), or more moderate expectations to comply and the helpful attitude of the speaker (in suggestions).

Explicit metapragmatic comments, performative expressions and other devices of specification typically function as ‘attentional framing’ or the ‘windowing of attention’ (Lakoff 2004; Langacker 2001). The operation of such frames, the various opportunities of elaboration and the activation of semantic components also depend on the degree of conventionality of the speech act types in question (cf. section 3.4 below).

To conclude, degree of explicitness/implicitness accounts for one of the major dimensions along which the speaker has control over attention management in her speech acts, by foregrounding or backgrounding the illocutionary force, assigning it a higher or lower degree of salience, elaborating it to varying degrees and profiling different facets, according to her communicative goals.

### 3.2. Length

Another important dimension of attention management concerning speech acts is **length**. Length influences the prominence (or ‘relative salience’) of illocutionary force, i.e., the amount of attention it attracts, on the basis of the principle of iconicity (Langacker 1987, 361; Pusch 2001, 375; Croft 2003, 103). Iconicity has a quantitative character here: the length of the linguistic expression is proportional to the attention span it receives. Length as a criterion may be applied to either the stretch of speech marking illocutionary force (cf. (5a–c)) or the speech act as a whole (cf. (5d), (6)), i.e., both can be shorter or longer.

- (5) (a) **Bocsánatot kérek**, *hogy elkéstem.*  
‘I apologise for being late.’
- (b) **Elnézést** *a késésért.*  
‘Sorry for being late.’
- (c) **Bocs** *a késésért.*  
‘Sorry I’m late’
- (d) *Sajnos nem jött a busz. Időben elindultam, de borzasztó a közlekedés.*  
‘Unfortunately, the bus didn’t come. I left on time, but the traffic is terrible.’

Apology receives shorter and shorter attention spans going from (5a) to (5c), which translates into lower and lower levels of intensity or prominence. However, (5d), despite being indirect and non-explicit, makes the act of apologising prominent by virtue of the larger attention span it demands. In certain cases, length is increased by repetition, which has an even stronger effect of enhancing intensity. For example, it makes prohibition more forceful in (6):

- (6) *Ezt megtiltom. Megtiltom. Szó sem lehet róla!*  
‘You mustn’t do that. You must not. I forbid it!’

In this example, explicitness and directness also play a role (cf. **3.1** and **3.3**, respectively).

### 3.3. Directness/indirectness

A further crucial dimension in the construal of speech acts is that of **directness/indirectness**, i.e., the option of performing certain acts through utterances with a different illocutionary force (cf. Searle 1975; Ervin-Tripp 1976; Brown–Levinson 1987; Szili 2002). Sometimes, this option is taken for reasons of economy of expression (when obvious inferential links exist); in other cases, the speakers consciously avoid direct construal on the basis of socio-cultural norms or particular discourse strategies. Although the research on (in)directness is usually concerned with degrees of politeness, the phenomena are also inherently related to attention. Here I will highlight only the main points in this regard.

Directness is linked primarily to the dimension of salience, i.e., the accessibility of a given illocutionary force. Direct constructions generally make an illocutionary force more salient, i.e., easier to access and more clearly defined than indirect ones, which may have a rather unstable character and a longer access time. Consider:



- (7) (a) Take the car in for service! – request  
 (b) The car pulls to one side again. – information/reproach/request

While (7a)'s illocutionary force is clearly defined, easy to access and salient, (7b) may serve any of the functions listed above (information/reproach/request): these tend to remain in the background and have a rather unstable and non-salient character. Generally speaking, directness offers easy access to the intended function of an utterance by shortening and making definite the mental path leading to the intended illocutionary force (cf. Leech 1983, 123), whereas with indirect forms this mental path may be longer and indefinite, with none of the possible illocutionary forces selected for standing alone in the focus of attention.

These attention differences are often exploited to serve social (interactional) goals. They may have a central role to play in face-saving and politeness: indirect expression puts the speaker's potentially offensive act into the background and leaves open a variety of interpretations, thus allowing larger elbow room for the listener to interpret and react (Thomas 1985, 767; Ervin-Tripp 1976, 51; Verschueren 1999, 218). Furthermore, directness or indirectness of linguistic construal (as well as the definite or negotiable character of illocutionary meaning) may represent iconically the interlocutors' relations and social attitudes (see below). Finally, the use of indirectness and hence the removal of the intended interpretation from the focus of attention may also be interpreted in the metaphorical space representing the cooperation between speaker and listener. By adopting an indirect form of expression, the speaker loosens her grip on attention management, "steps back" in the process of shared meaning generation, "leaving more space" and assigning a more active role to the listener.<sup>4</sup>

However, it has to be said that the indirect use of many constructions has become part of a conventional repertoire for polite linguistic behaviour: in such cases, illocutionary force may be indirect but still salient, clear and foregrounded vis-a-vis the literal meaning. This is greatly influenced by contextual support and the degree of conventionality associated with the expression in question (see below) (cf. Gibbs 1981b; Ervin-Tripp et al. 1987; Giora 2002).

<sup>4</sup> For "stepping back" and "leaving more space" as metaphorical acts expressing politeness in other aspects of discourse such as quantity of speech or proportion of initiatives and responses, see Linell et al. (1988).

Although in the study of this dimension, the focus is generally on the indirect end of the scale, the exploitation of directness is also worth elaborating on. By increasing directness, the speaker can place the intended illocutionary force into the centre or focus of attention, making it clearer (more delimited) as a result. This may enhance the speaker's chances of achieving her interactional goals, as illustrated by (8) below.

- (8) *Hová lett a kupak? Hol van most a kupak? A kupakot akarom! Add ide!*  
 'Where has the cap gone? Where is the cap now? I want the cap! Give it to me!'

This example is noteworthy not only for the gradual increase of directness it displays but also for the movement of attention from the transactional toward the interactional sphere. The interlocutors emerge from the background into the foreground (cap > cap/now > I > you/me), with the speaker's goals and the reaction expected from the listener becoming increasingly accessible.

Adopting a direct expression to specifying the kind of social action being performed, along with the foregrounding the speaker's vantage point can also represent power and the dominant attitude of the speaker (cf. Thomas 1985, 767), as in (9):

- (9) You mustn't do that. You must not. **I forbid it.**

Although research on directness/indirectness is typically concerned with the relationship between literal and intended illocutionary force, the semantic directness of a direct speech act also deserves to be investigated. For example, there is a notable contrast between saying *you are not telling the truth* and *there's a hitch somewhere in the calculation*.

### 3.4. Conventionality

Speech act constructions also vary in the degree of **conventionality** (and relatedly, prototypicality) associated with an utterance used in a given function, which is again highly relevant for the study of attention alternatives. Firstly, the illocutionary force of speech acts expressed in a prototypical and conventionalised way is easier to access and more salient, while less conventional expression (or the choice of performing a less prototypical speech act) has a detrimental effect on the salience of illocutionary force. Secondly, conventional speech acts are connected with several socio-cultural elements of knowledge, yielding cognitive schemas

or **frames** which can be exploited to support desired interpretation or for activation background knowledge. Finally, degree of conventionality also affects the relative salience (prominence) of a speech act with respect to other speech acts or alternative construals.

Conventionality is again a scalar dimension: in all cultures and communities, there are more conventionalised speech acts and less conventionalised ones (e.g., ‘baptising’ is more conventionalised than ‘offence’) (Hymes 1974; Strawson 1971; Bach–Harnish 1998; Marmaridou 2000). The linguistic expression associated with an action can also be conventionalised in different ways, where a distinction can be made between ‘conventions of means’ and ‘conventions of forms’ (Gibbs 1981a). Conventions of means are conventional strategies of a general kind for expressing certain illocutionary forces (e.g., an indirect question used as a request). Conventions of forms, for their part, concern the fact that for a certain function some expressions are more conventional than others. For instance, in indirect requests, the phrase *could you...?* is more common than its synonym *are you able to...?* (see also Morgan 1978). These conventions have a profound impact on the interpretation and processing of illocutionary force, cf. (10) below.

- (10) (a) *Good evening!* (cf. *Jó estét kívánok!* ‘Good evening’)  
 (b) *I wish you a wonderful evening!* (cf. *Kellemes estét kívánok!*  
 ‘I wish you a pleasant evening’)

(10a) is processed primarily as a greeting; its high degree of conventionality puts this function into the forefront of attention. By contrast, (10b) attests a lesser degree of conventionality and routinisation so that literal meaning is more salient here. Besides the greeting function, the sentence also expresses a ‘wish’, and each component structure (*wonderful*, *I wish*) attracts attention in its own right.

The study of conventionality also highlights the need for relating speech acts to types of social action and socio-cultural norms (cf. Hymes 1974). The linguistic expression of a speech act does not get conventionalised just by itself; it is also invariably supported by the frames, scenarios, or idealised cognitive models that provide its context for activation (cf. van Dijk 1977; Shank–Abelson 1977; Lakoff 1987). This is relevant for the functioning of attention because the elements of these scenarios or ICMs mutually evoke each other, and speakers can rely on the inferential networks involved in their construal of speech acts. Sometimes they adopt conventional structures, and exploit their potential for

evoking background elements through “attentional framing” (Lakoff 2004; Langacker 2001); in other instances, they express themselves in a less conventional way precisely in order to avoid such paths of activation.

Finally, degree of conventionality also affects the relative salience or prominence of a speech act. Conventionally expressed speech acts count as unmarked from the point of view of attention, whereas deviations from convention are marked. The latter may render the identification of illocutionary force more difficult, but may also serve to capture the listener’s attention (cf. Searle 1975; Gibbs 1981a). Hence, the choice between a more and a less conventional form of expression is crucial for attention management.

### 3.5. Perspectivity

Having looked at the dimensions of explicitness, length, directness and conventionality, we can finally discuss variation in terms of perspectivity. Here, the crucial issues include the choice of vantage point, the direction of attention as it is conceptualised in the speech act, and polarity.

As far as the choice of **vantage point** is concerned, utterances expressing a given speech act may be represented from either the speaker’s or the addressee’s perspective, or indeed from a neutral vantage point (Langacker 2008; Tátrai 2005). Concomitantly, different participants of the scene may be selected as primary (determining subject choice), which in turn results in varying levels of subjectivity.

- (11) (a) *Bocsánatot kérek.*  
 ‘I apologise.’  
 (b) *Bocsáss meg.*  
 ‘Forgive me.’  
 (c) *Bocsánat.*  
 ‘Sorry.’

(11a) and (11b) differ orthogonally in the way they portray the metaphorical direction of the action being conceptualised. They also select different participants of the scene as primary (i.e., as subjects): the speaker in (11a) and the addressee in (11b). In (11c), by contrast, neither of them is in focus, and the direction of the action is irrelevant, only the apologetic nature of the speech act stays in focus (cf. Langacker 2008, 86).

Subject choice is also highly significant in the following attention alternatives:

- (12) (a) *Őn nem mond igazat.*  
 ‘**You** are not telling the truth.’  
 (b) *Ez a számítás rossz.*  
 ‘This **calculation** is wrong.’  
 (c) *Én ezt nem hiszem.*  
 ‘**I** don’t believe this.’

The utterance in (12a) puts the listener into the focus of attention, whereas (12c) assigns this role to the speaker, with (12b) avoiding both of these choices. As the speech act in question has a strong face-destraining character, directing attention to the listener increases this unpleasant effect, while de-personalisation decreases it. This also correlates with the levels of directness involved; furthermore, displacement and an impersonal construction may imply objectivity and ‘a general voice of authority’ (cf. Langacker 2008, 86; see also Hámori 2007).

The perspectivity of speech acts may also be influenced by polarity (cf. Croft 1994). Here, the contrast between positive and negative (imperative and prohibitive) directives deserves special mention, cf. (13).

- (13) (a) Don’t let go!  
 (b) Hold on to it!

Also significant is the aspect of activity/passivity, or more specifically, the degree and direction of activity (question vs. answer, initiative vs. reaction; for its significance in discourse, see Linell et al. 1988).

Finally, the dimension of emotionality is also relevant for perspectivity, influencing the strength, prominence and interpersonal effects of speech acts. For example, the speech act of chiding is expressed with varying degrees of emotionality by the examples below.

- (14) (a) *Ez nem szép viselkedés.*  
 ‘This is not what I call nice behaviour.’  
 (b) *Borzasztóan viselkedsz!*  
 ‘Your behaviour is appalling!’

Variation along the dimension of perspectivity invites the application of a force dynamic model (Talmy 2000, 145). In (11) and (12), for example, there is a change in the assignment of Agonist and Antagonist roles as well as in the direction of movement between them; (13a) and (13b) portray the event differently in terms of the exertion of force, with resistance also

playing a part, while (14a) and (14b) show disparity in the amount of discharged energy.

Before closing this section, let me emphasise once again that the dimensions explored so far work closely together, and may develop into clusters. This has already been illustrated in (8), but it can also be observed in (15) below.

- (15) *A legkevésbé sem örülök annak, hogy ezek a motorosok éppen velem példálózna-  
k. Egész pontosan felháborítónak tartom. Kikérem magamnak!*  
'I am not in the least happy that these riders keep hinting at me. To be precise,  
I find it outrageous. I won't stand for it!'

First note that the intended message is made specific to varying degrees in the three sentences of the example above. In the alternatives *nem örülök* 'I am not happy', *felháborítónak tartom* 'I find it outrageous' and *kikérem magamnak* 'I won't stand for it', the illocutionary force is elaborated in different ways and different facets of the same situation are being focused on. Secondly, there is a shift of attention from the transactional to the interactional function of the utterance, with the first sentence geared toward informativity before performing a social act comes to be predominant. Thirdly, all this goes hand in hand with increasing levels of directness and emotionality. Finally, conventions and cognitive schemas also contribute to the observed effects, as the phrase *kikérem magamnak* 'I won't stand for it' activates a complex cognitive schema comprising knowledge of a discourse genre, action patterns and other social components (e.g., the attitude of fighting back, emotional saturation, and face-defending).

#### **4. Analysis—attention management and construal differences in the speech acts of a political debate**

Finally, let us examine illustrative samples from a political debate (a 1998 election debate between Gyula Horn and Viktor Orbán) to see how language users can exploit construal differences in speech acts to serve their interactional goals and global discourse strategies. Political debates have a twofold aim: to defeat the opponent in interaction and to impress the audience by qualities such as competence, honesty, politeness or power. These aims can even contradict each other, but impression making has

absolute priority. Therefore, **directing attention** and manipulating the mental state of the audience is of paramount importance.

One of key instruments which can be deployed to such effect is attention management related to interactional activity and speech acts, especially the **fore- or backgrounding of illocutionary forces**. In this section, my chief concern will be to analyse the difference between ‘positive’ (polite, supporting, constructive) and ‘negative’ (face-destroying)<sup>5</sup> illocutionary forces as they are put in the foreground or in the background, with the dimensions of explicitness, directness and length also making a significant contribution.

Political commentators and linguistic analysts agree that during the 1998 debate between Prime Minister Gyula Horn and rival candidate Viktor Orbán, politeness was a key priority (cf. Hámori 2007). Poll results are available concerning the perception of toughness in the debate (Gallup 1998), according to which the majority of the audience (65%) had not sensed tough linguistic features in the discourse, 25% found them to be more characteristic of Gyula Horn, and only 10% assigned them to Viktor Orbán. As we shall see shortly, this perception cannot be put down to the debate’s content or the amount of positive and negative speech acts the two candidates performed; there were, however, huge differences in terms of style and the construal of speech acts.

Let us begin by observing **positive (polite, constructive) speech acts**. In the debate examined here, both Horn and Orbán used them unsurprisingly. Horn’s positive speech acts predominantly expressed politeness indirectly and with a small degree of explicitness (typically via pragmatical softeners), resulting in a lower level of salience, cf. (16).

- (16) (a) *hozzá szeretném tenni*  
‘I would like to add’  
(b) *amit szeretnék mondani, az az alternatíva*  
‘what I would like to say is the alternative’

Horn also used some direct and explicit positive acts expressing agreement or interest. Overall, the high number of his positive speech acts reflects his constructive and polite attitude, yet his politeness in its real function attracted the attention of the audience less than Orbán’s politeness on the surface did. Orbán addressed fewer positive speech acts to his rival during the debate than Horn did, but this was outweighed by the fact

<sup>5</sup> Leech (1983, 104); cf. Brown–Levinson (1987).

that Orbán expressed politeness in a very salient way, mostly with highly explicit and direct speech acts signalling respect (being at somebody's service, asking for permission, etc., cf. (17) below).

- (17) (a) *engedje meg a miniszterelnök úr, hogy megköszönjem*  
 'allow me, Mr. Prime Minister, to thank you'  
 (b) *Miniszterelnök úr, ahogyan ön óhajtja.*  
 'As you like it, Mr. Prime Minister'  
 (c) *Én állok rendelkezésére.*  
 'I'm at your service'

These highly explicit expressions created the impression of politeness and constructivity even though these surface traits did not necessarily reflect the speaker's real attitude to his rival.

These results are confirmed by the study of **'negative', face-threatening** acts, which show a similar difference in explicitness, only in the opposite way. The discourse participants made approximately the same number of face-destroying remarks on their partner or his political program (e.g., criticism, challenge, refutation, irony). The construal of these remarks, however, was different. Gyula Horn performed his negative speech acts in a salient, explicit and direct way, while in the utterances of Viktor Orbán negative illocutionary force was less salient. His face-threatening acts were embedded in a positive act, negative (damaging) illocutionary force was backgrounded and made non-salient by indirectness; meanwhile, explicit positive acts continued to highlight the positive intention of the speaker.

As an example, the speech act of **'refutation'** or **'giving the lie to the partner'** will be exemplified below, which is one of the most seriously face-destroying acts and played a central role in the debate under discussion. In Horn's case, most of the refuting acts (9 out of 13) are explicit and direct, therefore, the element of rudeness is prominent and in focus, cf. (18).

- (18) (a) *Ami **nem igaz** és nem tudom, hogyan jött ez ki.*  
 'Which **is not true**, and I don't know how this is worked out.'  
 (b) *Először is **nem igaz**, amit a munkanélküliségről mondott.*  
 'First of all, what you said about unemployment **is not true.**'  
 (c) *Ez így **nem igaz**.*  
 '**It's not true** in the way you put it.'



Orbán, for his part, performed 10 refuting acts, almost as many as Horn. However, most of them (7) were implicit and strongly indirect acts that relied on the audience's inference and deductive reasoning; furthermore, all of the refuting acts were indirect and embedded in another speech act (e.g., apology, warning). Hence their illocutionary force was backgrounded and non-salient. As an illustration, consider Orbán's remark quoted in (19) below.

- (19) *Nehéz úgy vitatkozni a gazdaságról, hogyha a **tények előtt nem hajlunk meg**.*  
 'It is difficult to argue about economy if **facts aren't yielded to**.'

Although the implied meaning of the sentence is that the partner has made false statements, i.e., he has lied, this is not stated explicitly. Indirect construal is important here, and so is the use of a generic subject (translated as a passive construction).

Orbán also uses the dimension of explicitness/implicitness to great effect in foregrounding positive, and backgrounding negative illocutionary forces, cf. (20).

- (20) *A beszélgetés előttünk álló szakaszára is szeretném mondani a miniszterelnök úrnak, hogy **méltatlannak tartanám** a mostani beszélgetésünk súlyához azt, hogy ha rendre **arra kényszerítene** a miniszterelnök úr, hogy... **arra emlékeztessen, hogy nem biztos, hogy nem csalja meg az emlékezete**.*  
 'I would like to tell you, Mr. Prime Minister, also with regard to the forthcoming part of the conversation, that **I would consider it unworthy** of the gravity of this conversation of ours, if you **forced me** permanently, Mr. Prime Minister to... **remind you, that it is not sure your memory does not play tricks on you**.'

Here what is going on is not simply the softening of a face-threatening act but the complex arrangement of positive and negative actions in the domain of attention. Explicit, foregrounded and implicit illocutionary forces contrast strongly with each other:

**Implicit acts:**

- threatening (*rendre... arra emlékeztessen* 'permanently...to remind you')
- giving the lie to Horn (*megcsalja az emlékezete* 'your memory plays tricks on you', you are not telling the truth, you lie)
- imputation (*rendre* 'permanently...': you lie permanently)
- reproach, dishonouring (*méltatlannak tartom* 'I consider it unworthy')

**Explicit acts and attitudes:**

- *szeretném (mondani)* 'I would like (to say)' – politeness by pragmatic softener
- *arra kényszerít* 'you force me' – I do it against my wish, in a lower position

- *szeretném mondani* 'I would like to say', *emlékeztessenem* 'to remind you' – positive, constructive behaviour
- *nem biztos, hogy nem csalja meg az emlékezete* 'it is not sure your memory does not play tricks on you' – politeness by litotes
- *megcsalja az emlékezete* 'your memory plays tricks on you': you are wrong, you are not telling the truth – politeness by indirectness

While explicit elements represent a largely polite, positive attitude and suggest the inferior status of the speaker, in the background, less saliently, there are also seriously face-destroying acts suggesting a higher status, superiority and dominance:

explicit	↔	implicit
polite		threatening
inferior		reprimanding, dominant
reminding		refuting

In (20), the role of conventionality in facilitating comprehension can also be observed in the conventionalised figure of litotes (*it's not sure... does not play* implying 'it's sure [that it does]'), along with the phenomenon of semantic indirectness in the euphemism *your memory plays tricks on you* (section 3.3).

A similar construal strategy is displayed in the following utterance:

- (21) *Azt kell mondanom, hogy ő azt kell mondanom, hogy utoljára **teszem** ismét, miniszterelnök úr, mert **resteltem**, a KSH-ra hivatkozik, amikor **azt mondja, hogy** a kis- és középvállalkozóknak a forgalma és a bevétele növekedett. A termelés egyötödét adó középmeretű cégek ötvenegy és háromszáz fő között alkalmazók, **mondja a KSH jelentése**, kilenc százalékkal bővítették termelésüket, ami derék. Míg a tizenegy- és ötvenfős gazdálkodók teljesítménye nyolc százalékkal csökkent a KSH [szerint]... szerintem ugyanazt kapom én is, amit ön szokott kapni, tehát ez a számadat így olvasható (taps, nevetés). **Bevallom őszintén, hogy... bevallom...***

'I have to say, that, er, I have to say, that I do it for the last time again, Mr. Prime Minister, because I'm ashamed of it, you are basing your claims on KSH (Hungarian Central Statistical Office) when you say that the trade and income of minor and medium entrepreneurs have grown. Medium size firms, which account for one fifth of the [country's] production, and employ fifty-one to three hundred people, according to KSH's report, increased their production by nine percent, which is nice. However, the production of companies with eleven to fifty employees has decreased by eight percent [according to] KSH... I think I receive the same [data] as you do, so this figure should be interpreted this way (applause, laughter). I admit frankly that... I admit...'

In the centre of the intended message is an implied face-destroying speech act: exhaustive refuting of the false statement made by the partner. However, the focus of attention is on explicit constructive or supportive acts such as apologising and excusing.

- (22) (a) azt **kell mondanom**, hogy öö azt kell mondanom, hogy  
'**I have to say**, that, er, I have to say, that'
- (b) **utoljára teszem** ismét, miniszterelnök úr  
'**I do it for the last time** again, Mr. Prime Minister'
- (c) mert **restellem**  
'because **I'm ashamed of it**'
- (d) **bevallom** őszintén, hogy... **bevallom**  
'**I admit** frankly that... **I admit**...'

Arguably, it is precisely these 'supportive' acts that draw the attention of the audience to the implied illocutionary force and the face damage incurred by the partner. Length also plays a fundamental role here: long-winded apology and repetition keep this face-destroying act long in the focus of attention, thus enhancing its salience iconically.

To sum up, this political debate shows major differences in the construal of speech acts by the participants, both in positive (polite and supportive) and negative (face-threatening) domains. It supports the conclusion that construal is not a local phenomenon only; rather, it may serve global impression-making strategies. The speaker's choice or ability to exploit the opportunities concerning attention management (cf. the dimensions discussed in section 3), especially with regard to backgrounding negative and foregrounding positive (advantageous) illocutionary forces, may crucially influence the prominence of these forces in the domain of attention, with major repercussions for the processing of the interactional activity of the interlocutors and the impression they made on the audience.

## 5. Summary

In this paper, I have discussed the importance of attention management and related aspects of the construal of speech acts. After some introductory remarks in sections 1 and 2, I set up and extensively illustrated attention alternatives in the construal of speech acts—with special regard to attention management concerning illocutionary force—along the

dimensions of explicitness, specificity, length, directness, conventionality and perspective (section 3), also highlighting their relations to each other and to the interlocutors' interactive goals or even strategies. Then I moved on to present a case study for further demonstrating the feasibility of these analytic criteria (section 4). Although the topic deserves more investigation than the scope of this paper has afforded, it is safe to say that attention management concerning illocutionary force and other components of speech act meaning is a crucial factor in the way speech acts are produced and comprehended, and its analysis may shed light on dimensions of language use that have hitherto received relatively little attention.

### References

- Alston, William P. 1994. Illocutionary acts and linguistic meaning. In: Tsohatzidis (1994, 29–50).
- Austin, John L. 1962. *How to do things with words: The William James lectures delivered at Harvard University in 1955*. Clarendon Press, Oxford.
- Bach, Kent – Robert Harnish 1998. Simple version of speech act schema. In: Asa Kasher (ed.): *Pragmatics: Critical concepts*. II, 65–8. Routledge, London.
- Brown, Penelope – Stephen C. Levinson 1987. *Politeness: Some universals in language usage*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- Chafe, Wallace 1994. *Discourse, consciousness and time: The flow and displacement of conscious experience in speaking and writing*. The University of Chicago Press, Chicago.
- Clark, Herbert H. 1996. *Using language*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- Croft, William 1994. Speech act classification, language typology and cognition. In: Tsohatzidis (1994, 460–77).
- Croft, William 2003. *Typology and universals* (2nd ed.). Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- Croft, William 2009. Toward a social cognitive linguistics. In: Vyvyan Evans – Stephanie Pourcel (eds): *New directions in cognitive linguistics*, 395–420. John Benjamins, Amsterdam & Philadelphia.
- Croft, William – David Alan Cruse 2004. *Cognitive linguistics*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- Deane, Paul D. 1992. *Grammar in mind and brain: Explorations in cognitive syntax*. Mouton de Gruyter, Berlin & New York.
- Dijk, Teun A. van 1977. Context and cognition: Knowledge frames and speech act comprehension. In: *Journal of Pragmatics* 1: 211–32.
- Ervin-Tripp, Susan 1976. Is Sybil there? The structure of some American English directives. In: *Language in Society* 5: 25–66.

- Ervin-Tripp, Susan – Amy Strage – Martin Lampert – Nancy Bell 1987. Understanding requests. In: *Linguistics* 25: 107–43.
- Gallup 1998. <http://www.gallup.hu/Gallup/Aktualis/hornorban/Mainho.html>
- Geeraerts, Dirk – Herbert Cuyckens (eds) 2007. *The Oxford handbook of cognitive linguistics*. Oxford University Press, Oxford.
- Gibbs, Raymond W. Jr. 1981a. Memory for requests in conversation. In: *Journal of Verbal Learning and Verbal Behavior* 20: 630–40.
- Gibbs, Raymond W. Jr. 1981b. Your wish is my command: Convention and context in interpreting indirect request. In: *Journal of Verbal Learning and Verbal Behavior* 20: 431–44.
- Giora, Rachel 2002. Literal vs. figurative language: Different or equal? In: *Journal of Pragmatics* 34: 487–506.
- Hámori, Ágnes 2007. Párbajokról nyelvészetileg. Miniszterelnöki viták a társalgás-elemzés tükrében [On duels in linguistic terms: Prime ministers' debates and discourse analysis]. In: *Századvég* 43: 3–35.
- Hymes, Dell 1974. *Foundations of sociolinguistics: An ethnographic approach*. University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia.
- Imrényi, András 2008. Szerkezeti fókusz – pragmatikai típusjelölés? [Structural focus – pragmatic type marking?]. In: *Általános Nyelvészeti Tanulmányok* 22: 203–39.
- Lakoff, George 1987. *Women, fire, and dangerous things: What categories reveal about the mind*. The University of Chicago Press, Chicago.
- Lakoff, George 2004. *Don't think of an elephant! Know your values and frame the debate*. Chelsea Green, White River Junction VT.
- Langacker, Ronald W. 1987. *Foundations of cognitive grammar, Vol. 1: Theoretical prerequisites*. Stanford University Press, Stanford.
- Langacker, Ronald W. 2001. Discourse in cognitive grammar. In: *Cognitive Linguistics* 12: 143–88.
- Langacker, Ronald W. 2008. *Cognitive grammar: A basic introduction*. Oxford University Press, Oxford.
- Leech, Geoffrey N. 1983. *Principles of pragmatics*. Longman, Harlow.
- Linell, Per – Lennart Gustavsson – Päivi Juvonen 1988. Interactional dominance. In: *Linguistics* 26: 415–62.
- Marmaridou, Sophia S.A. 2000. *Pragmatic meaning and cognition*. John Benjamins, Amsterdam & Philadelphia.
- Morgan, Jerry 1978. Two types of convention in indirect speech acts. In: Peter Cole (ed.): *Syntax and semantics, vol. 9: Pragmatics*, 261–80. Academic Press, New York.
- Pusch, D. Claus 2001. Ikonizität. In: Martin Haspelmath – Ekkehard König – Wulf Österreicher – Wolfgang Raible (eds): *Language typology and language universals. An international handbook/Sprachtypologie und sprachliche Universalien. Ein internationales Handbuch/La typologie des langues et les universaux linguistiques. Manuel international (Handbücher zur Sprach- und Kommunikationswissenschaft 20.1)*, 369–84. Walter de Gruyter, Berlin & New York.

- Sadock, Jerrold 2004. Speech acts. In: Laurence R. Horn–Gregory Ward (eds): *The handbook of pragmatics*, 53–73. Blackwell, Oxford & Malden MA.
- Schmid, Hans-Jörg 2007. Entrenchment, salience, and basic levels. In: Geeraerts–Cuyckens (2007, 117–38).
- Searle, John R. 1969. *Speech acts*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- Searle, John R. 1975. Indirect speech acts. In: Peter Cole–Jerry L. Morgan (eds): *Syntax and semantics*, vol. 3: *Speech acts*, 59–82. Academic Press, New York.
- Shank, Roger–Robert Abelson 1977. *Scripts, plans, goals, and understanding*. Lawrence Erlbaum, Hillsdale NJ.
- Strawson, Peter 1971. Intention and convention in speech acts. In: *Philosophical Review* 63: 439–60.
- Szili, Katalin 2002. A kérés pragmatikája magyar nyelven [The pragmatics of requests in Hungarian]. In: *Magyar Nyelvőr* 126: 12–30.
- Talmy, Leonard 2000. *Toward a cognitive semantics*. Vol. 1: *Concept structuring systems*. MIT Press, Cambridge MA.
- Talmy, Leonard 2007. Attention phenomena. In: Geeraerts–Cuyckens (2007, 264–93).
- Talmy, Leonard 2009. The attention system of language. A report on work in progress. (<http://linguistics.buffalo.edu/people/faculty/talmy/talmyweb/Handouts/attention1.pdf>)
- Tátrai, Szilárd 2005. A nézőpont szerepe a narratív megértésben [The role of perspective in narrative understanding]. In: *Általános Nyelvészeti Tanulmányok* 21: 207–29.
- Thomas, Jenny A. 1985. The language of power: Towards a dynamic pragmatics. In: *Journal of Pragmatics* 9: 765–83.
- Tomasello, Michael 1999. *The cultural origins of human cognition*. Harvard University Press, Cambridge MA.
- Tsohatzidis, Savas L. (ed.) 1994. *Foundations of speech act theory: Philosophical and linguistic perspectives*. Routledge, London & New York.
- Verhagen, Arie 2007. Construal and perspectivization. In: Geeraerts–Cuyckens (2007, 48–82).
- Verschueren, Jef 1999. *Understanding pragmatics*. Arnold, London.